Vol. 2, No. 3: Sep 2026 [STILLNESS]

CONTRIBUTORS

WRITERS

Elizabeth Carey lives on a farm with her wife and their eleven animals. In her spare time, she enjoys writing and mixed media art.

Marianne Heames is a Clay Artist, Storyteller and Teacher. She comes from a family of artists and sees life through lenses of Hope and Light.

Dale Lyles coaches the Backstreet Writers Group on Tuesday mornings. Ask him about his new children's book, *A Bug's Lunch*.

June Claire ("June Bug") Otis grew up in Newnan and went to the high school on Temple Ave before it was destroyed. She was married and widowed seven times and has no children but 12 grandchildren. She never learned how to drive but she uses her bicycle for transportation and collects things in her basket/buggy. She has a close relationship with her Instacart shopper. She has been published twelve times, including in *Southern Journal*, *Assisted Living Recorder*, and *Dementia Care Journal*.

Sara Pace volunteers at Backstreet, leading classes in fiber arts and collage. Photography is her first love!

H. Russell is a student that spends all spare time in the arts. This includes painting, revamping clothes, and writing music, poetry, short stories, and novels.

Robert Thompson is a singer, actor, and now embracing poetry. Still a gen. x kid at heart with gray hair. He still dreams of Broadway and is trying to decide what to be when he grows up.

ARTISTS

Rhoda June Baines is a loving mother, grandmother, and a follower of Christ. A retired registered nurse that loves the arts and a believer of bigger dreams.

Faith Farrell spends her time at Backstreet Arts and Newnan Theatre Company. Her column “Getting Frank With Faith” can be read in Coweta Magazine.

Brendan Stevenson is a 34-year-old autistic local artist pursuing his bachelor’s in behavior analysis.

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The *Backstreet &... Zine* publishes four times a year. The theme of this issue is STILLNESS; many submissions this issue reflect this theme.

The theme of the December issue will be LIGHT.

— Again, Faith Farrell

The Memory of Joy

When you have trouble remembering what joy feels like, think of the first time you felt the velvet nuzzle of a horse brush your hand, the safe cool darkness of a barn in summer, the smell of hay and straw and grain and manure and leather. The sound of hooves clipclopping down the aisle of cobblestones, the sighs and snuffs and snorts, the soft neighs and whinnies. The jingle of the halter draped over your shoulder, the clip of a lead rope gently attached, the clinking of the stirrups against the saddle and the buckles of the girth.

Curry the horse's sweaty coat so it's once again smooth and dry. Lift each hoof to pick out the dirt and mud and manure of other horses. Feel the cool mist of the fly spray. Give the horse a peppermint sneaked from someone else's tack box since you don't have your own, run your hand down his cheek and speak softly. Hear his hooves clipclopping as you come out together from the barn into the brightness of the summer sun, the blue of a cloudless sky.

Hold the lead rope loose as you walk side by side down the dirt road to the pasture. Unfasten the gate's latch and hear it creak as it opens. Lead him into the pasture, unclip the halter and ease it back over his ears, the weight of it folding into itself and onto your hand. Trace his face with your hand one last time and neatly loop up the lead rope as you watch him walk away and then roll to and fro on his back, the contentedness of his shaking and snorting as he returns to his feet.

Walk back through the sweet-smelling grass as you return to the gate, hang the halter and looped lead rope on the hook on the fence, the last jingle. Take one last look back as you breathe in horse and grass and barn, sun and blue sky.

Climb back into your family's minivan and go home. Hide your riding helmet in the back corner of your closet and on bad days crawl under the hanging clothes and hold the helmet close to your face. Breathe in deep, deep enough that if you close your eyes you're still there. Hold on to that. Hide the helmet again and crawl back out of the closet.

You can keep going now.

— Elizabeth Carey

I am Still

The earth turns
The sun sets
The days move on
The people plead
To be heard and seen
The earth spins
The moon wanes
The days leap past
Yet I am still
And I still am

I exist within this space
I still live
Still I claim my own will
And I will be moved
I know I have a place
I will not lose it

So while they push
And while they wade
Through their own choices
I will wait
And I will stand
My ground

For I will not be
The hostage to other's voices
And I will not be
A subject to angry noises
And I will not be
The product of a life chosen for me

I cling to
What keeps me from the flooding
I beat down
What keeps me from new budding

And I stay
I am steady
I will keep to the way
I have already determined
I am not a pawn in their game
I choose to not be played

So as
The water churns
The moon wanes
The days keep in turn
I will be seen
I will be heard
When the earth has spun
And the sun has set
Enough times
Where I was still
And I still was

So I am still
And I still am

— H. Russell

The Still Art of Bubbles — Brendan Stevenson

Cats Sitting

Like stones in a Japanese garden they sit,
obtuse and opaque, without reference to time,
controlling the universe, silently. It

looks like they wrap the room's vacuum around them to frame
their being and essence. The others
not fighting, just sitting and doing the same,

weave a conflict of vectors, a network of eithers,
of boths and of neithers, a webbing of space
which ties the world down just as each cat prefers.

One stretches and moves. The cosmos has changed
to accommodate this one's perspective. The cats
are changing your fate with the planets they face.

— Dale Lyles

Silence

Silence is not the absence of struggle.

It is the place inside the struggle where I stop fighting my own existence.

It is the place where grief is given sky.
Where fear is given breath.
Where the tired body is allowed to become soft and miraculous again.

It is choosing not to call myself broken when what I really mean is healing.

Stillness does not mean I do not hold darkness.
It does not mean the night has vanished of that I have forgotten the rooms that frightened me.

It means I no longer confuse darkness with the whole sky.

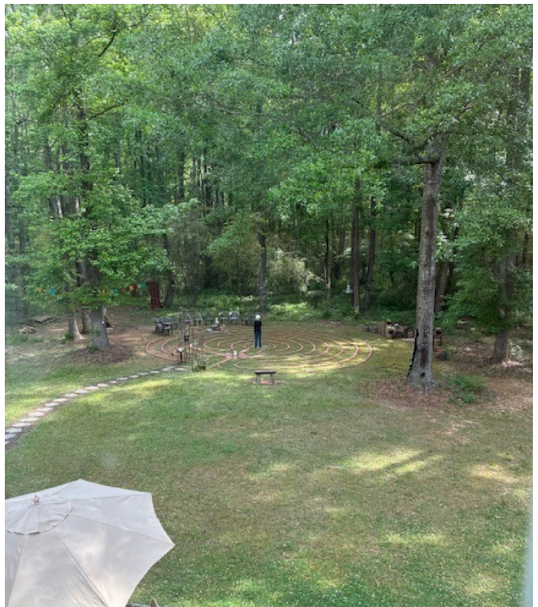
It means I carry the lantern.
I carry it into the hidden rooms within me.
I hold it near the grief, the shame, the longing, the fear.

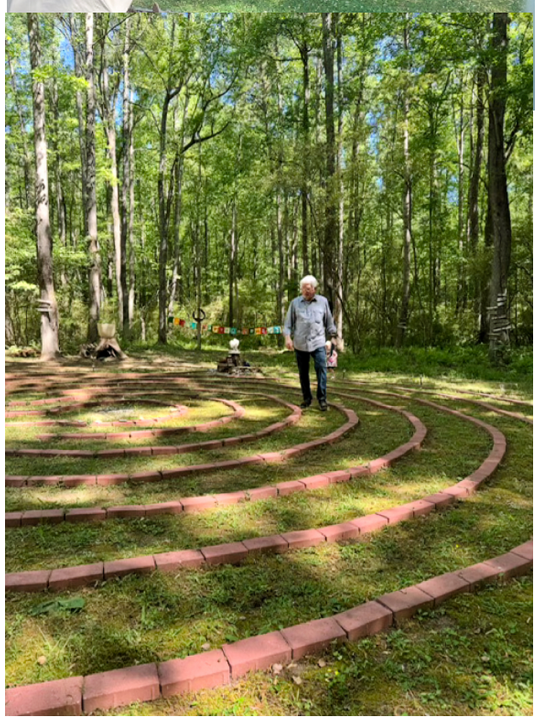
I do not demand that they disappear.
I do not banish them.
I sit beside them.

I lift the lantern.
I let the light touch what is there without becoming what is there.

The lantern does not destroy the night.
It teaches me how to walk through it.

— Sara Pace



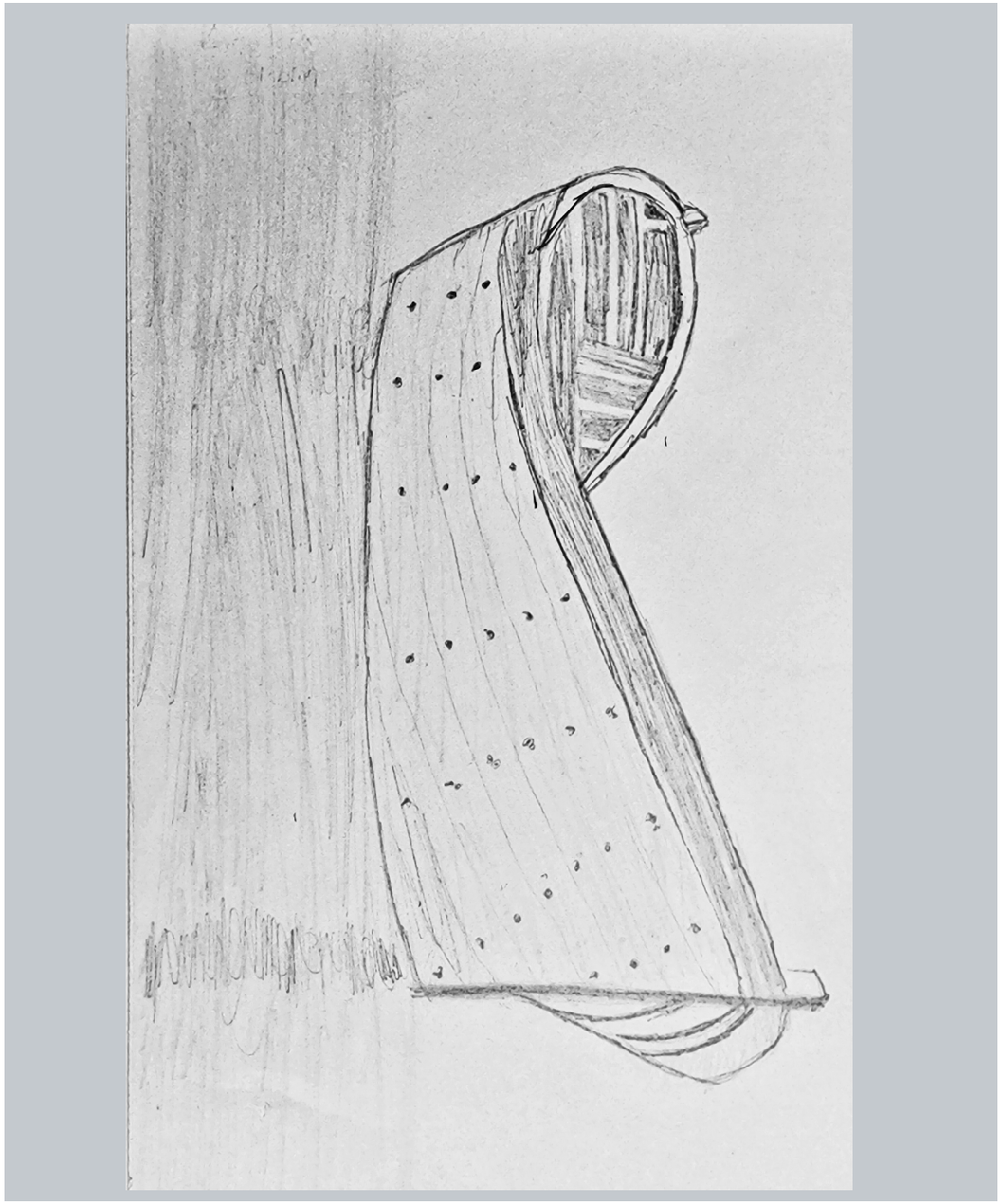


A Little Monk

Inside each of us
there is a little Monk,
longing for quiet space
to enter silence, and
mystical moments.
This little Monk
takes long walks
along the way of life
winding through
the labyrinth and
around pond paths
searching for frogs
and dragonflies.
The little Monk listens
With inner peace
to the music of nature
and prayer whisperers.
This Little Monk
rejoices at the sight
of stones,
at moss patches,
ant hills, tall grasses
and weed flowers.
Then the little Monk
returns home
refreshed and ready
once again to embrace
with renewed joy,
the dyings and risings
in the marketplaces
of life's journey.

— Marianne Heames

This is the labyrinth in our yard where we put on our Little Monk yearnings and venture out in silence to discover a symphony of quiet inspirations on most Georgia days. We prefer rain sounds from our window.



SERENITY — RHODA JUNE BAINES

Snapped

At 5am, just before her alarm clock went off at 5:15 a.m, she got a notification on her phone. She had been drifting in and out of sleep since 3am when a nightmare had woken her up. She had been drenched in so much sweat that her husband (who avoided any and all bodily fluids) had exited their bedroom for the guest room. She knew she should have immediately gotten out of the bed at 3 a.m, apologized profusely to her husband, insisted on running him a warm shower (because it took till Kingdom come to get hot water in their house), and in the meantime she would have stripped every single thing off the bed, from duvet cover to mattress pad so there would be no trace of her sweat left behind on the naked mattress. And then she should have re-dressed the bed with the equivalent of every thing she had just pulled off, but this time everything would be out of their linen closet (a linen closet that would be color coded and labeled with sheets that had been washed by hand and hung to dry in the fresh country air and then ironed, all to be completed by her amid her many other duties as a good and dutiful wife.)

By the time her husband would have gotten out of the shower, she would have had a clean and dry bed waiting

for him and herself clean and dry as well, since as a warrior of the Lord she would have been able to strip and re-dress the bed, start the wash and somehow miraculously wash herself and blow dry her waist length hair all in the timespan of one of his showers. One point in her favor was that he took very long showers, partly because it never would have crossed his mind that she might have liked a warm shower too, but also because he seemed unable to take a shower without jerking off. Even with the length of one of his showers, though, it would have required a miracle for her hair to be fully dry, and she had long ago learned that she did NOT have a direct line of communication to Jesus, despite being assured of the contrary, so there would be no miracle. And he hated her hair when it was wet. Actually, it seemed like he hated it in general, particularly when it was not on her head, and especially if she had not been keeping the cleanliness of their home close to Godliness so that he came across one of those mutant tumbleweeds formed from a combination of her hair, dust, and dirt that could roll across a room when it had been too long since she last vacuumed. She hated vacuuming because of the noise and much preferred crawling around on all fours with the dustpan and brush to make it appear relatively clean. And he wasn't exactly observant (to put it mildly), so he didn't usually notic-

e that their floors were not in a state of Godliness until he had stepped on one of her hair tumbleweed dust bunnies or seen one floating in midair due to the strong breeze from the fan that he kept trained on himself at night. She realized now that he had actually rolled his fan with him when he had exited for the guest room, which meant that the sheets that were still wet with her sweat had developed a swampiness - a kind of warmth along with the wet. And meanwhile she knew her husband had immediately fallen back asleep because he fell asleep all the time in all different situations; snoring on the couch when she was trying to watch a TV show, one of her few escapes from her warrior of the Lord life, falling over on the pew during one of their pastor's interminable sermons, or drifting off to sleep while driving but refusing to let her drive instead and also refusing to pull over, instead putting both of their lives in jeopardy because he would rather kill them both than admit he was falling asleep, probably from undiagnosed narco-lepsy, not that he put any stock in modern medicine besides enthusiast-ically using his CPAP machine. The falling asleep at the wheel thing wouldn't have bothered her - in fact, she would have encouraged him to gift her with an early death, but she did not want to die next to him or at the same time because what if they arrived at the

hereafter at the same time? Would they truly be linked for eternity? Their pastor already liked to remind all the married couples in the congregation on a regular basis that this was part of their marriage covenant, and it never failed to make her feel like the time she ate that bad grocery store sushi. The thought of possibly being more likely to be forever linked on account of simultaneous death was enough for her to keep waking him up on the road. But surely their hereafters would be separate - didn't God owe her at least that? Even if He worked in mysterious ways, she was still at a loss for the reasoning behind the choices He had apparently made for her life, like that her husband would be HER husband, or that after six years she would still be failing to become pregnant. That's what that notification had been, she thought, as she rolled over and reached for her phone while her mind screeched back to the present. That app that their pastor had suggested, the "natural" family planning one that had her recording the color and texture of her daily vaginal secretions (probably for some sicko men in a back room somewhere gorging themselves on the mental images of Christian women's discharge) had dinged to tell her that she was most likely ovulating today. Which was great. Just like every one of the previous months when she and her husband would fail again to be

fruitful and multiply. But it was always her failure, she was the one who had gotten a phallic ultrasound wand inserted and had that awful endometrial biopsy that was much more painful than "just a pinch" and all the other times she had stripped down in a freezing medical office, trying to cover herself with the tiny paper gown (because there were unfortunate consequences to eating her feelings every day of every week). And meanwhile in those same six years her sister had managed to have seven children (twins) and given them all names that started with the letter "H." She never remembered who was Hadley or Hayden or Hailee, and they all looked alike anyway, each one having inherited her sister's blonde hair and blue eyes, and each baby looking more cherubic than the last one. Her sister clearly had an arrangement worked out with the Lord to be able to have seven natural births in a kiddie pool in their living room all while being consistently camera ready for her husband (who was videotaping the whole thing to be posted online). Her sister's face would look almost euphoric with every contraction, as though pushing a watermelon out of her vagina was a transformative spiritual experience. Now she groaned as she started to peel her wet body, wet pajamas, off the hot sheets and to sit up on the bed. The sun was still low enough in the sky to temporarily blind her as

she opened the curtains, and as she
blinked back into focus, she caught a
glimpse of herself in the mirror
above the dresser. Her hair was not
only wet from the sweat but also
frizzy from the stickiness of the
pillow she had tossed and turned on
since 3 a.m. At first she was dis-
gusted with her reflection, but as
she bent over to pick a pair of her
husband's socks off the floor, the
light caught the auburn in her hair,
and when she saw herself out of the
corner of her eye, her hair piled on
her head with her left hand, with a
few tendrils hanging down, she looked
almost beautiful — or maybe not beau-
tiful, but as a beautiful woman might
look after a very different night
than hers had been, a night of sweat
not from nightmares but instead from
the kind of pleasure she'd find when
her husband wasn't home. She sighed
discontentedly and walked into the
bathroom, tossing her husband's socks
in the hamper on the way. Maybe she
would be the one to have a hot shower
today, and she checkled softly to
herslef as she turned the knob all
the way to the hottest setting. He
could have a cold shower today.

— June Claire O.

Never Still.
Buzzing, vibrating, quaking, shaking,.
Never composed.
Never cool.
Never seeing a cleansing breath.
Not knowing any of the pieces.
I sprint and chase and grasp.
You see the picture Big—
I cant get past trees.
I'm immune to the straitjacket.
I bust at the seams.
My clothes all sorted to shade,
because I cant be bothered to think.
I never think.
I only feel.
Never calm.
Never collected.
Dancing, writing, singing, laughing.

—Robert Thompson

Backstreet Community Arts exists to provide a safe, welcoming, creative environment to anyone who may benefit from the healing power of art and community.

Study after study proves that Art has a positive effect on the mind, body and soul.

Backstreet Arts reaches out to adults who may not be aware of or have access to the proven healing power of art: those who have experienced trauma, illness, or grief; veterans; homeless and limited-income individuals who cannot afford art classes, and anyone who wants to practice art in a comfortable, non-intimidating, inclusive atmosphere.

Backstreet is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. We believe that Art Saves Lives...because it saved ours.

19B First Ave, Newnan, GA (behind Bridging the Gap)

https://backstreetart.org

On the cover: Zine — Faith Farrell